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Historiography of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement, 1977-79*

MORE THAN FIFTY BOOKS, AND MORE THAN 100 ACADEMIC ARTICLES, HAVE appeared in English alone dealing in significant part with the Iranian revolutionary movement. This impressive output, published in just 15 years, does not reflect a similarly copious wealth of source materials. In fact, the study of the Iranian revolutionary movement is largely, one might argue, sound and fury, a lot of grand theorizing lacking a solid empirical basis. No work on the Iranian revolution has made systematic use of all forms of primary evidence that are currently available, though some are more thorough than others.¹

This paper discusses Western historiography of the Iranian revolutionary movement of 1977-79, which led to the fall of the Pahlavi regime in February 1979.² It does not attempt to cover works on the post-revolutionary period, after the fall of the shah. In addition, it does not deal specifically with individual secondary works on the Iranian revolution. Instead, it examines the available primary sources and the implications of these sources for the study of the revolutionary movement. This approach is based on the hypothesis that sources shape our analysis in important ways, and vice versa. For instance, the use of Central Bank data will help support an economic approach to the revolution; the use of U.S. government documents may lead to an international-pressure argument; the use of texts by leading revolutionaries may be conducive to an explanation privileging ideology.

The currently available evidence may be divided into two broad categories: contemporaneously produced material and post-hoc material. Within the contemporaneous category there are three primary producers of the historical record: journalists, both Iranian and foreign; government officials, both Iranian and foreign (primarily from the United States); and Iranian oppositionists, who produced a prodigious quantity of pamphlets and other writings during the course of the rev-

*I would like to thank Hamid Algar, Abbas Amanat, Shaul Bakhash, and participants at the 1994 conference of the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. Unfortunately, historiography in Iran suffers from a similar lack of empirical rigor, especially in the study of the 20th century. See Abbas Amanat, "The Study of History in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Nostalgia, Illusion, or Historical Awareness?" *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1991): 3-18.

2. "Western" is intended to include Iranian expatriates who operate in Western academic settings.

olutionary movement. Within the post-hoc category there are again three forms of evidence: published memoirs by participants and observers, both Iranian and foreign; oral histories of the revolution that have been collected by three oral-history projects, one in Iran and two in the United States; and interviews with participants and observers conducted by Western academics, excerpts from which have appeared in published works on the revolution. A list of primary sources—necessarily incomplete but still, one hopes, of some use—is presented in the appendix.

I. Contemporaneous Sources: Journalistic Accounts

The first group of sources, Iranian press accounts of revolutionary events, has been a difficult source for historical work on the revolution, with both the comprehensiveness and credibility of its news coverage in question. Iranian journalists were heavily censored up to late summer 1978, when they reversed position and became cheerleaders for the revolution. The major newspapers' two months' strike (early November 1978 to early January 1979) left this crucial period covered only by movement papers (the National Front's *Khabarnāmah* and the Writers' Guild's *Hambastigi*). And when the regular press re-appeared in early January, its boosterish reports were hardly distinguishable from the movement papers'. Protestors, referred to as "anti-national terrorists" a few months earlier, were now "freedom-seekers." Security forces were now "thugs." One quantitative study reports that *Kayhān* and *Ittilā'āt*, the two largest Tehran dailies, devoted fully a quarter of their stories to interviews, announcements, and other messages from the opposition during the period 6 January–11 February 1979.³

The international press, dominated by journalists from the United States, is problematic for other reasons. First, the foreign correspondents did not pick up the revolution story until fairly late in 1978. Second, as noted in Dorman and Farhang's study of U.S. press coverage of the revolution, the foreign correspondents, when they did arrive, tended to be overly deferential to official sources and unprepared to cover a revolution.⁴ Bombarded with conflicting reports on events—the government spokesmen downplaying and the opposition spokesmen exaggerating the scope and importance of each protest—the foreign journalists were largely unwilling and unable to go out and get eyewitness corroboration.

Nonetheless, the media—both Iranian and foreign—do include numerous tidbits of evidence that help provide a day-to-day picture of the revolutionary movement. One modest example is an interesting story in *The New York Times* (4 December 1978) describing a poor Tehran family and their reluctance to become involved in the revolutionary events.

3. Na'im Badii and L. Erwin Atwood, "How the Tehran Press Responded to the 1979 Iranian Revolution," *Journalism Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 517–23, 536.

4. William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

II. Government Documents

Iranian government documents on the revolutionary movement have, with few exceptions, disappeared into the files of Iran's new rulers and are not available for research. Still, most scholars have not made use of the handful that have found their way into publication. For instance, Ibrahim Yazdi transcribes several SAVAK documents on coup planning.⁵ Hamid Ruhani transcribes two SAVAK memoranda (and reproduces the cover pages) describing two contacts with Ayatollah Kazim Shari'at-Madari, as part of the official post-revolutionary campaign to discredit Shari'at-Madari.⁶ Shams al-Din Amir-'Ala'i reproduces several documents from the files of the Iranian embassy in Paris, where he was ambassador for a time after the revolution, including an abortive plan to kill Khomeini the month before his return to Iran.⁷ An interesting book, *Miṣl-i barf āb kh' āhīm shud* (We Will Melt Like Snow), transcribes tape-recordings of crisis meetings of the shah's military commanders in January 1979.⁸ This source has not, so far as I have found, been verified by the participants, but it seems highly realistic. In particular, the generals do not appear bloodthirsty or anti-Islamic, as one might expect of a fabricated transcript published in post-revolutionary Iran. According to comments in the transcript, the recordings were made on the orders of the chief of staff.

U.S. government documents, by contrast, are available in large number. Thousands of secret memoranda and reports have been reproduced (or in a few cases transcribed) in the 69-plus volumes of *Asnād-i lānah-yi jāsūsi* (The Spy-Nest Documents), published by the militant students who captured the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979.⁹ The series has been collected in several university libraries around the U.S. A few of these documents were painstakingly un-shredded by the Iranian publishers, but the large majority are simply photocopied from the embassy files. These volumes are loosely organized according to broad themes; an index of names has been published in Iran.¹⁰

Even more usefully, the National Security Archives in Washington, D.C., a citizen watchdog group which specializes in Freedom of Information Act requests, has won the release of hundreds of additional U.S. government docu-

5. Ibrahim Yazdi, *Ākharin talāshhā dar ākharin rūzhā* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Qalam, 1363 Sh./1984), 249–99.

6. Hamid Ruhani (Ziyarati), *Shari'at-Madāri dar dādghāh-i tārikh* (Qum: Daftar-i Intisharat-i Islami, 1361 Sh./1982), 146–57.

7. Shams al-Din Amir-'Ala'i, *Dar rāh-i inqilāb: dushvārihā-yi ma'mūriyat-i man dar Farānsah* (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-yi Dihkhuda, 1362 Sh./1983), 226–7.

8. *Miṣl-i barf āb kh' āhīm shud: muṣākirāt-i "shūrā-yi farmāndahān-i artish"* (Day-Bahman 1357), 3rd printing (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 1366 Sh./1987).

9. *Asnād-i lānah-yi jāsūsi*, 69+ vols. (Tehran: Danishjuyan-i Musalman-i Payru-yi Khatt-i Imam, 1980–).

10. *Fihrist-i asāmi-yi shakhsiyathā-yi siyāsī va ijtimā'i dar asnād-i lānah-yi jāsūsi-yi Āmrikā*, covering vols. 1–60 (Tehran: Shabarin, 1365 Sh./1986).

ments, and has published the whole lot along with the *Asnād-i lānah-yi jāsūsi* documents in chronological order on microfiche.¹¹

The U.S. government documents tell much about the inner workings of the U.S. foreign service, but less about the Iranian revolution than one might hope, primarily because embassy officials did not have much contact with the Iranian opposition. What contact they did have was mainly with representatives of moderate intellectual groups, whose perspective on events was often repeated in embassy reports to Washington. An egregious example is the huge religious demonstrations of mid-December 1978, which the U.S. embassy attributed to the "mass organizational skills" of a small liberal oppositional group, the Iranian National Front. "Marches were run by INF, not Khomeini," according to a U.S. embassy memorandum of 13 December 1978.¹² Yet credible oral histories by INF members in the Harvard collection (discussed below) indicate clearly that the INF had no mass organizational skills and participated in the December demonstrations as a harried, barely tolerated junior partner to the clerical forces. It is worth mentioning in this connection that CIA officials in Iran were pleading, as late as one month before the departure of the shah, for more Persian-speaking agents.¹³

However, the U.S. officials' reports on daily events are generally more credible than others', if only because they often describe their sources. In addition, the U.S. ambassador and his staff deserve credit for recognizing the victory of the revolution at about the same time the shah did—that is to say, in mid-November 1978.

III. Opposition Pamphlets

The third contemporaneous source is the multitude of opposition public pronouncements which were written, copied, and distributed covertly throughout Iran during the course of the revolution. Every opposition group, and some individuals as well, propagated their views in this manner, and these *i'lāmīyahs* were a major source of information for the Iranian public. Numerous individual pronouncements have been published in assorted periodicals and books, and there are a variety of major collections of pronouncements, including collections devoted to Ruhollah Khomeini, Mahmud Saduqi and Mahmud Taliqani.¹⁴

11. National Security Archives, *Iran: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1977–1980*, microfiche collection, index, and guide (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1989).

12. National Security Archives, doc. 1913.

13. Bob Woodward, *Veil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 101.

14. For Khomeini the most accurate collections appear to be *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981); *Majmū'ah-i az maktūbāt, sukhanrānīhā, payāmhā va fatāvi-yi Imām Khumaynī*, ed. M. Dahnavi (Tehran: Intisharat-i Chapkhass, 1360 Sh./1981), along with its supplement published a year later. For Saduqi see Mahmud Saduqi, *Majmū'ah-yi ijtīlā'iyyahā-yi sivvumin shahīd-i mīhrāb hazrat-i āyat Allāh Sadūqī* (Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance, 1362 Sh./1983). For Taliqani see Mahmud Taliqani, *Az āzādi tā shahādāt*, 2nd printing (Tehran: Intisharat-i Abu Zarr, 1359 Sh./1980).

Other important collections cover specific periods, such as *Shahīdī digar az rūhānīyat* (Another Martyr From the Clergy) on late 1977, *Darbārah-yi qiyām-i hamāsah-āfarīnān-i Qum va Tabriz* (On the Epic Uprising of Qum and Tabriz) on early 1978; and *Pārah'i az i'lāmīyahhā-yi muntashīrah dar Īrān dar māhhā-yi tīr va murdād 1357* (Selected Pronouncements Published in Iran in the Months of July and August 1978) on summer 1978.¹⁵ Regional collections such as Sayyid Hasan Nurbakhsh's on Isfahan and Ramazan 'Ali Shakiri's on Mashhad provide useful detail that is not available in the Tehran-centered national collections.¹⁶

Various political organizations published collections of their own pronouncements, such as the Liberation Movement and Muzaffar Baqa'i-Kirmani's Toilers' Party among the moderate oppositionists, the Mujahidin-i Khalq (People's Strugglers) and the Fida'īyan-i Khalq (People's Sacrificers) among the guerrilla organizations, and the Iranian student associations in Europe and North America. Among these, one collection which stands out is the Fida'īyan-i Khalq's *Guzārīshātī az mubārīzāt-i dalīrānah-yi mardum-i khārij az mahdūdāh* (Reports on the People's Valiant Struggles Outside the [City] Limits), a fascinating account of the Tehran shanty-dwellers' protests of August 1977.¹⁷

Finally, there are overview collections such as 'Ali Davani's 10-volume series on the Iranian clerical movement, the last half of which covers the revolutionary period, and Wolfgang Behn's microfiche publication of a meta-collection of other collections.¹⁸ Other pronouncements have been gathered at the Centre Iranien de Documentation et des Recherches in Paris, at the Hoover Institution on War and Revolution at Stanford University, and in numerous private collections.

In sum, these collections, both published and archival, are a tremendous source for historical work, but they have to be examined critically. For all the apparent immediacy of these pronouncements, they commonly fail to identify the context

15. *Shahīdī digar az rūhānīyat* (Najaf: Ruhaniyat-i Mubariz-i Irani, 1356 Sh./1977); *Darbārah-yi qiyām-i hamāsah-āfarīnān-i Qum va Tabriz*, 3 vols. (n.p.: Nahzat-i Azadi-yi Iran, 1357 Sh./1978); *Pārah'i az i'lāmīyahhā-yi muntashīrah dar Īrān dar māhhā-yi tīr va murdād 1357* (Willamette, Ill.: Organization of Iranian Moslem Students, 1978). This final collection is also reproduced as doc. 20:121 in Wolfgang Behn, *Iranian Opposition to the Shah*, microfiche collection and guide (Zug, Switzerland: Inter Documentation Company, 1984).

16. Sayyid Hasan Nurbakhsh, *Yādvārah-yi nahzat-i islāmī tā 22 Bahman*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhangi-yi Islami, 1360 Sh./1981); Ramazan 'Ali Shakiri, *Inqilāb-i islāmī-yi mardum-i Mashhad az āghāz tā istiqrār-i jumhūrī-yi islāmī* (Mashhad: Part-i Grafik-i Mashhad, 1359 Sh./1980).

17. *Asnād-i nahzat-i āzādi-yi Īrān* (Tehran [?]: Nahzat-i Azadi-yi Iran, 1362 Sh./1983), vol. 9, part 2, subtitled "Şafahātī az tārikh-i mu'asir-i Īrān"; Muzaffar Baqa'i-Kirmani, *Shinākht-i haqiqat* (Kirman: Parm Chap, 1980 [?]); Fida'īyan-i Khalq, *Guzārīshātī az mubārīzāt-i dalīrānah-yi mardum-i khārij az mahdūdāh* (Tehran [?]: Sazman-i Chirikha-yi Fida'īyan-i Khalq, 1977); *Chand i'lāmīyah az junbish-i kārgari-yi Īrān* (London: Iranian Students' Union in London, 1978); *Nabard-i tūdāhhā: chand guzārīsh az Īrān* (Frankfurt-am-Main/Berlin: Iranian Students' Union in Germany, 1978), reproduced in Behn, *Iranian Opposition to the Shah*, doc. 20:111.

18. 'Ali Davani, *Nahzat-i rūhānīyūn-i Īrān*, 10 vols. (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Imam Riza, 1360 Sh./1981); Behn, *Iranian Opposition to the Shah*.

of the documents, the first-hand or second-hand status of the historical accounts contained in the documents, how the documents were collected, whether they had been previously published, and other information. Some of the versions available today were collected, printed, and even edited by groups outside of Iran. An example is the report on the Qum demonstration of January 1978, apparently written by an eyewitness, which was published once in Iran¹⁹ and twice abroad.²⁰ In the *Darbārah-yi qiyām* version, the text is cleaned up somewhat (full dates are substituted for abbreviations, colloquial abbreviated verbs are replaced with complete verbs, and so on). The *Zamimah/Asnād* version, however, is substantially shortened (entire sections are simply omitted), and contains one sentence not included in the other version. All three collections present the text as though it were the original.

IV. Post-Hoc Sources: Memoirs

Memoirs, though always useful sources, tend to present filtered versions of the past which bathe the author in a benign light. This is particularly true in memoirs of the Iranian revolution, most of which cast doubt on the accuracy of their own accounts through the lack of self-criticism. It is simply hard to believe that the authors are as righteous as they portray themselves.

Memoirs also present a selectivity problem, since the authors are a self-selected group who may be unrepresentative of the participants in the revolution. In the Iranian case, memoirs are generally written by secular intellectuals and émigrés, and not by the Islamic militants who led the revolutionary movement. Here, only a few interesting memoirs that have not been used as widely as they deserve are mentioned. Mahmud Gulabdarah'i's *Lahzāhhā* (Moments), a detailed and unusually self-critical account of the author's experiences (August 1978–February 1979), offers fascinating snippets of detail like the author's family telling and apparently believing stories of Khomeini's supernatural powers.²¹ *Tarḥ-i suqūt-i yak pādishāh* (The Plot to Topple A King), a conspiracy-filled book by an anti-revolutionary Iranian industrialist now in the United States, is valuable for its first-person account of a campaign by factory owners to break up the general strike in winter 1978–79.²² A two-volume diary by an American Muslim on contract at a military base in Isfahan records in meticulous detail the rumors and news of the revolution; the author does not hide his bitterness to-

wards the U.S. government for supporting the shah rather than evacuating himself and other Americans.²³

In place of memoirs, Islamic activists have left some record of their lives in *yadnāmāhs*, published collections eulogizing the martyrs of the revolution and reproducing interviews, testaments, and other biographical material. These volumes differ from ordinary biographies, which are legion in Iran, because they include personal reminiscences by their subjects and their subjects' acquaintances. Some collections focus on individuals such as Javad Bahunar, Muhammad Muntaziri, and Husayn-'Ali Muntaziri.²⁴ Three collections cover a wide range of Shi'i clerics.²⁵ These are exceptionally useful sources for historical work on the religious cadres of the revolutionary movement. The material in these collections, however, is almost entirely undocumented, so validity is uncertain. In addition, the presentation can be confusing, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the editors' voice from the subjects'. Nonetheless, the hagiographic intent makes slightly seamy details all the more credible, for instance the biography of one young cleric who apparently underwent guerrilla training in Turkey and smuggled guns into Iran²⁶—actions which were much rumored at the time and frequently denied.

V. Oral Histories

Three institutions have compiled extensive oral history collections covering the period of the Iranian revolutionary movement. Two of these are in the United States: the Iranian Oral History Program at Harvard University and the Program of Iranian Oral History at the Foundation for Iranian Studies in Bethesda, Maryland. Thousands of pages of transcripts in these collections have generated a tremendous amount of detail on the revolutionary period, including valuable "insider information" on the liberal opposition and the workings of the state. Both of these collections focus on leading personalities, almost all of them in exile, so the religious groups are under-represented. (An exception is Sa'id Raja'i-Khurasani in the Harvard collection, a post-revolutionary Iranian ambassador to the United Nations who describes his days as a religious militant at Tabriz University.) In addition, the interviewers tend to be somewhat obse-

23. Charles I. Semkus, *The Fall of Iran, 1978–1979*, 2 vols. (New York: Copen Press, 1980).

24. *Shahid Duktur Bāhunar, ulgū-yi hunar-i muqāvamat*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Vahid-i Farhangi-yi Bunyad-i Shahid-i Inqilab-i Islami, 1361 Sh./1982); *Farzand-i Islām va Qur'an*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Vahid-i Farhangi-yi Bunyad-i Shahid, 1362 Sh./1983); Mustafa Izadi, *Guzarī bar zindagī-yi faqih-i 'āliqadr āyat Allāh Muntazirī* (Tehran: Su-rush, 1362 Sh./1983).

25. 'Ali Rabbani Khalkhali, *Shuhadā-yi rūhāniyat-i shī'ah dar yak-ṣad sālah-yi akhīr*, 2 vols. (Qum: Intisharat-i Maktab al-Husayn, 1361 Sh./1982 and 1362 Sh./1983); Riza Muradi, *Zindagī-nāmāh-yi pishvāyān-i inqilāb*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Kazimi, 1363 Sh./1984); *Pishtāzān-i shahādāt dar inqilāb-i sivvum* (Qum: Daftar-i Intisharat-i Islami, 1360 Sh./1981).

26. Khalkhali, *Shuhadā-yi rūhāniyat* 2:147.

19. *Zamimah-yi khabarnāmāh*, no. 13 (Farvardin 1357/March–April 1978): 15–23.

20. *Darbārah-yi qiyām*, 39–58; *Asnād va taṣāvirī az mubārizat-i khalq-i musalmān-i Īrān* (Tehran: Abu Zarr, 1978), 1:26–32, reproduced in Behn, *Iranian Opposition to the Shah*, doc. 10:3.

21. Mahmud Gulabdarah'i, *Lahzāhhā*, 3rd printing (Tehran: Intisharat-i Kayhan, 1365 Sh./1986), 21.

22. Jalal Ahanchiyan, *Tarḥ-i suqūt-i yak pādishāh* (Mill Valley, Calif.: self-published, 1982), 370–85.

quious in the presence of their prominent subjects and do not always challenge evasions and self-serving statements.

The third oral history collection is in Tehran at the Foundation for the History of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. As of late 1988, this collection consisted of around 180 interviews with clerical, political, cultural, and military "personalities," involving 512 hours of tape and more than 15,000 pages of transcripts.²⁷ Short selections from these transcripts—discussed below—have been published in Iran, but the value of this resource has not yet been tested. The term "personality" (*shakhsīyat*) suggests, however, that this collection also favors elite figures.

VI. Interviews

A final source for post-hoc recollections are interviews, portions of which have been published in academic and other historical works. Collections of interviews include one covering women from across the social spectrum, one covering leaders of the revolutionary movement, and one covering an interesting assortment of down-and-out and middle-class Iranians. Only portions of these books, however, are devoted to the revolutionary period of 1977–79.²⁸

The burgeoning academic literature on the Iranian revolution also contains occasional interview quotations. These should be the greatest strength of current work, since historical documents may not come to light for decades or centuries, while millions of eyewitnesses and participants are still alive. Of particular note among the academic interviewers are Assef Bayat, Mary Hegland, Farhad Kazemi, and Tahmoores Sarraf, who made special efforts to interview a variety of Iranians and who include a fair number of quotations in their work.²⁹ But these researchers, with the exception of Bayat, just happened to be working in Iran when the revolution broke out. Since 1980–81, when foreign researchers' access to Iran was drastically limited, virtually the only subjects available for interview have been expatriates.

Gaps and Over-Emphases

The primary sources currently available give a far clearer picture of Iranian elites

27. Ghulam-Riza Kirbaschi, "Bakhsh-i khātirāt," *Yād* 4, no. 13 (Winter 1367 Sh./1989): 40.

28. Omol Bani, *Fatima Statt Farah: Erfahrungen einer Frau in der iranischen Revolution* (Tubingen, Germany: Iva-Verlag, 1980); Nasir Hariri, *Muṣāhibah bā tārikh-sāzān-i Irān* (Tehran [?]: n.p., 1984); Fred Saint-James, *Au Nom de dieu clément et miséricordeux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983).

29. Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (London: Zed, 1987); Mary Elaine Hegland, "Imam Khomeini's Village: Recruitment to Revolution" (Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1986); Farhad Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1980); Tahmoores Sarraf, *Cry of a Nation: The Saga of the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

than of non-elite Iranians. These elites are by no means a single group: for instance, the clergy, government officials, and intellectuals form discrete social categories which only occasionally overlap. However, the perspective of elites in no way predicts the perspectives of non-elites.

As a demonstration of this problem, take the sample of 83 Iranian visitors to Istanbul, Turkey, interviewed by the author in winter 1989–90. These were people who had participated in the events of the revolutionary movement and who intended to return shortly to Iran, and thus were not expatriates.³⁰ Class background could be determined for 80 of these respondents. Of the educated middle class—salaried professionals, private and governmental officials, and their high-school and college-age children—61 percent (19 of 31) named democracy or social democracy as one of the goals of their participation in the Iranian revolution. Of the rest of the respondents—shopowners, workers, farmers, and their high-school and college-age children—only 35 percent (17 of 49) listed these goals. Conversely, 55 percent of the educated middle class (17 of 31) and 71 percent of the rest (35 of 49) discussed Islamic themes as their goals for participation. (Respondents sometimes gave multiple reasons for participating.) These figures are *not*, it must be emphasized, the product of a random sampling of the Iranian population, and therefore should be taken as suggestive, not definitive. But what they suggest is that different social groups in Iran may have had different reasons for participating in the anti-shah movement.

Another systemic problem in the study of the Iranian revolution is the over-emphasis on left-oriented organizations and ideologies. For instance, the Mujahidin-i Khalq and the Chirikha-yi Fida'īyan-i Khalq, revolutionary guerrilla groups which attracted considerable followings at Iranian universities at the time of the revolution, play a prominent role in most accounts of the revolutionary movement. However, these organizations operated in a relatively small circle of members and supporters prior to the fall of the shah—no more than a few thousand people, perhaps, in a country of 35 million.³¹ These groups' own official accounts of their activities also give a sense of how limited their role was: Kazem Radjavi's book on the Mujahidin, for instance, notes several independent actions but largely treats the Mujahidin as a subsidiary of Ayatollah Mahmud Taliqani's organization.³² A Fida'īyan pronouncement claimed responsibility for five guerrilla attacks in the summer of 1978³³—the group was not moribund or inactive, but it can hardly claim a leadership role at a time when public protests came to number in the dozens each week.

30. The methodology for this study is discussed further in Charles Kurzman, "Structure and Agency in the Iranian Revolution, 1977–1979" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992).

31. Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

32. Kazem Radjavi, *La Révolution iranienne et les moudjahedines* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1983). See also Mujahidin-i Khalq, *Barrasi-yi muhimmtarin tahavvulāt-i siyāsī: az nīmah-yi khurdād '57 tā nakhustvazīrī-yi Bakhtiyār* (n.p.: Sazman-i Mujahidin-i Khalq-i Iran, 1979).

33. Untitled pronouncement of 9 Mihr 1357/1 October 1978, in the collection of the Centre Iranien de Documentation et des Recherches, Paris.

As for the final uprising in Tehran on 9–11 February 1979, which toppled the remnants of the Pahlavi regime, historical accounts typically identify the guerrilla groups as the leaders of this event. Indeed, the Fida'iyān happened by coincidence to have planned a march for the morning of Saturday, 10 February. This march was re-routed towards the center of the uprising, the Dowshan-Tappah airbase, and members of the Fida'iyān undoubtedly participated in the storming of police stations and other events.³⁴ But eyewitness accounts of the uprising indicate that even before the Fida'iyān march could reach Dowshan-Tappah, insurgent air-force technicians and local residents had repelled two attacks by the Imperial Guard.³⁵ Moreover, guerrillas were not the only ones with weapons—armories were being looted and rifles distributed to any man who could show his military-service card.³⁶

Similarly, numerous accounts of the revolution emphasize the influence of 'Ali Shari'ati, the left-leaning sociologist and Islamic theorist who was imprisoned and then exiled in the mid-1970s and died in 1977. Clearly Shari'ati was popular with university students, who filled his lectures to overflowing in the late 1960s and early 1970s and devotedly recorded and transcribed his remarks. Shari'ati's thought is frequently cited as one of the motivating factors of the revolutionary movement. However, these accounts do not present evidence that Shari'ati's influence reached outside of the university setting. Several factors might have limited this influence. For one, Shari'ati did not speak to large audiences; he never appeared on television or radio, and his active career as a lecturer lasted for only a half-decade or so. Second, prior to the final days of the revolutionary movement, Shari'ati's works could not be sold openly. Clandestine distribution limited his readership inside Iran. Third, university students were not necessarily on good terms with less educated and less privileged Iranians as a secondary channel of influence.

The leftist groups eventually lost out in the post-revolutionary power struggle. And throughout the pages of most academic work on the Iranian revolution is a sense of enthusiasm betrayed, of great hopefulness followed by great disappointment. Leftists may indeed share this disenchantment with other social groups in Iran—certainly reports coming from Iran suggest that many people are similarly disillusioned. But when disenchantment of this sort combines with theoretical exegesis, structural analysis follows. There is an elective affinity at work here: theorists may be more likely to credit the inexorable force of structural conditions when they have supported a promising social movement that has been defeated. This seems to have been the case among American social scientists following the decline of the 1960s social movements.³⁷ Similarly, Iranians sympathetic to the left tend to emphasize the structural vulnerability of the

Pahlavi state, the social forces generating the revolution, the organizational position of the Islamic clerics, and other structural factors—in effect, these factors seem to be explaining the defeat of the left without blaming the left.

Structuralist theoretical approaches to the Iranian revolution, however, may be preventing researchers from pursuing the form of historical evidence most in abundance, namely interviews with live participants and eyewitnesses. A half century from now, more documentary evidence will have become public, but researchers will undoubtedly regret that the opportunity for widespread interviewing has passed.

Potential for Further Interview Research

Just how feasible is interview research in Iran? Given the Islamic Republic's attempt in recent years to attract foreign scholars to conferences and lectureships in Iran, the prospects may be improving. An interesting test case is the journal *Yād* (Memory), published by the Foundation for the History of the Islamic Revolution in Tehran. This journal, which has appeared in at least 30 issues since its debut in 1986, contains in each issue a "memoir section" featuring excerpts from the foundation's oral history collection (discussed above). Leading clerics such as Hashimi Rafsanjani (now president of Iran) and 'Ali Davani have given very interesting personal accounts of friction and cooperation within the Islamic establishment—but only, thus far, covering the 1950s and early 1960s. Whether *Yād* continues to publish material up through the 1970s may be an indication of the Iranian government's willingness to allow serious academic study of the revolution.

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34. See *Iṭīlā'āt*, 10 February 1979.

35. *Iṭīlā'āt*, 10 and 11 February 1979; *Āyandigān*, 11 February 1979.

36. See, for instance, Riza Barahani, *Dar inqilāb-i Irān, chih shudah va chih kh" āhad shud?* (Tehran: Nashr-i Zaman, 1358 Sh./1979), 123; Gulabdarah'i, *Lahzakhā*, 327–8; and newspaper accounts.

37. Charles Kurzman, "Disillusionment and Structuralism in the Study of Social Protest" (forthcoming).

Appendix

Primary Sources on the Iranian Revolutionary Movement, 1977–79

With a few exceptions selected for their particular usefulness, this listing omits article-length material, books which are largely secondary sources, and books which deal only in passing with the period 1977–79. It also leaves out material already cited in the footnotes and elsewhere in the article.

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